

One child in three may not need those four eyes

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Medical Editor

A THIRD of primary school children who wear glasses do not have significant vision problems, according to a world-first Sydney study whose leader says it suggests possible overservicing by optometrists.

The survey of 1740 Sydney six-year-olds – the first to compare children's use of glasses with actual measures of their sight – found 4.4 per cent wore glasses.

But 34 per cent of those did not need them, according to the criteria used by Paul Mitchell, professor of ophthalmology at the University of Sydney. He identified an additional 1.5 per cent who might benefit from glasses but did not have them.

All the unnecessary glasses had been prescribed by optometrists, rather than medical specialist ophthalmologists, he said. Further research was needed into why glasses were prescribed, he wrote in the *Journal of the American*

Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus.

The head of the department of ophthalmology at the Children's Hospital at Westmead, Frank Martin, praised Professor Mitchell's research, which he said suggested it might be better to review children with more minor defects after a short interval before prescribing glasses – because children's vision could change rapidly as they grew, and they sometimes performed inconsistently in eye tests.

But Robert Hilkes, a spokesman for the Optometrists Association Australia, said Professor Mitchell's criteria for deciding who needed vision correction were flawed.

Professor Mitchell was "looking at vision in isolation, not quality of life", and nearly half the children whose glasses use was deemed unnecessary had complained of symptoms such as sore eyes or blurred vision. "From our perspective it's a clear attack on optometry," he said.

